



Jo Rupert Behm, M.S., RN
State and Federal Public Policy Consultant
Health and Education
160 H. Lane Novato, California 94945-2628
Ph: (415) 897-2426 Fax: (415) 897-8115
jobehm@behmer.us

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To develop another 'test' to serve as an alternative CAHSEE equivalent does not make sense as any test would require 2-3 years to field test and validate and a start-up development budget of \$10-\$12 million. Plus, misinformation, confusion, and conflicts between NCLB/AYP and IDEA and California's restrictive test variation policy [accommodation v. modification] would still persist and continue to result in inconsistent or denied access to helpful test accommodations and modifications at the LEA level.

More importantly, seniors and parents need to know immediately if they will be able to graduate from a California high school next June with a real diploma if students will obviously meet or exceed all other graduation requirements. Seniors and parents need time to relocate, enroll in private school, get an online diploma, or do whatever it takes to keep their life going in a positive direction if the CAHSEE requirement for the class of 2006 is not swiftly lifted.

The most appropriate, sensible, expedient, cost-effective and equivalent alternate to the CAHSEE is a **course equivalent model** which can immediately [or ASAP] grant local school districts the authority to award standard diplomas if seniors pass required rigorous standards-based core ELA and math courses upon which the CAHSEE is also based. Passing 4 ELA and 2-3 math courses [which include Algebra I standards] is more than 'equivalent' to the CAHSEE---it is a superior measurement of student standards-based academic achievement. This alternative provides evidence of CAHSEE equivalent standards based achievement in ELA and Math spanning 12-14 semesters, netting 60-70 required graduation credits. The CAHSEE alone is an artifact created under stress without benefit of linguistic alterations, real-life drafts and edits, or modern computerized versions. By contrast, the **course equivalent alternative** provides considerably more reliable evidence to gauge academic achievement, graduation eligibility and predict college and workplace aptitude and vital personal traits that cannot be measured with a test. Overall, the **course equivalent alternative** is much more informative and also meets the litmus test of 'multiple measures' since a variety of courses, teachers, methodology, projects, exams, and technology converge to determine grades.

The **course equivalent alternative** has the added advantage of not requiring CDE to tamper with or retrofit NCLB/AYP policy or reporting [except to markedly improve graduation rate]. Ironically, NCLB discourages use of large scale AYP 'systemic' assessments for individual student 'high stakes' decisions:

"Nothing in this part shall be construed to prescribe the use of the academic assessments described in this part for student promotion or graduation purposes." [State Plans, 20 U.S.C. 6311(1)]

Imposing *high stakes* graduation consequences in California was a legislated decision [SB 2X 1999-O'Connell] and California lawmakers can reverse it within a few days or weeks with emergency legislation.

Since less than 6 months before graduation is unrealistic to develop, field-test, and validate any alternative recommended in reports [such as senior portfolios, summer school, community college programs] school districts must be permitted to use passing grades in CAHSEE equivalent courses as part of their local graduation decisions in lieu of passing the CAHSEE.

Offering camp-style, faux *Certificates of Completion* or *Attendance*, summer school, a community college program aimed at passing the CAHSEE, or keeping college and career bound students with disabilities in school until age 22 are intolerable options for seniors who have otherwise fully earned and deserve to receive a real diploma in June. A diploma is required to take advantage of life-building post-secondary options. The 8-10% of students with severe cognitive disabilities generally not at grade level or expecting to graduate with a standard diploma are not taking the CAHSEE.

While the State grapples with this enormous dilemma there are 2,590 high schools teaching seniors, including continuation, community-based, opportunity, magnet, pregnant/parenting, independent study, County Offices of Ed, CA Youth Authority, state special schools, and charter schools spread over 500 districts awaiting word from CDE on how to honor and graduate their seniors who have faithfully and responsibly earned this right. Your support to ensure these seniors and those to follow have fair and equitable access to future options is urgently needed.

Jo Behm, RN., M.S.